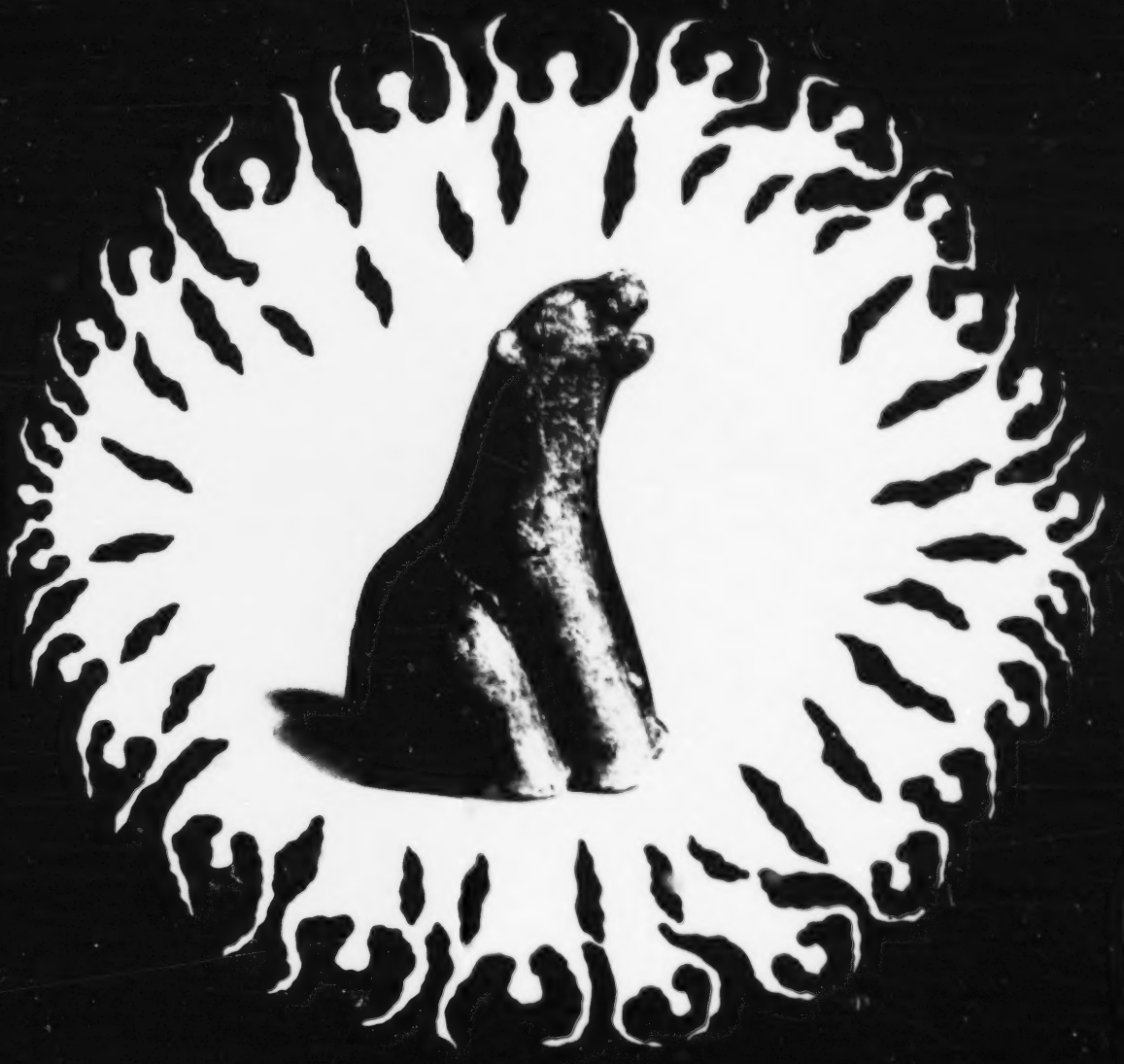
SPIRITS OF EARTH AND WATER

Ancient Dorset Eskimo Culture of Newfoundland and Labrador



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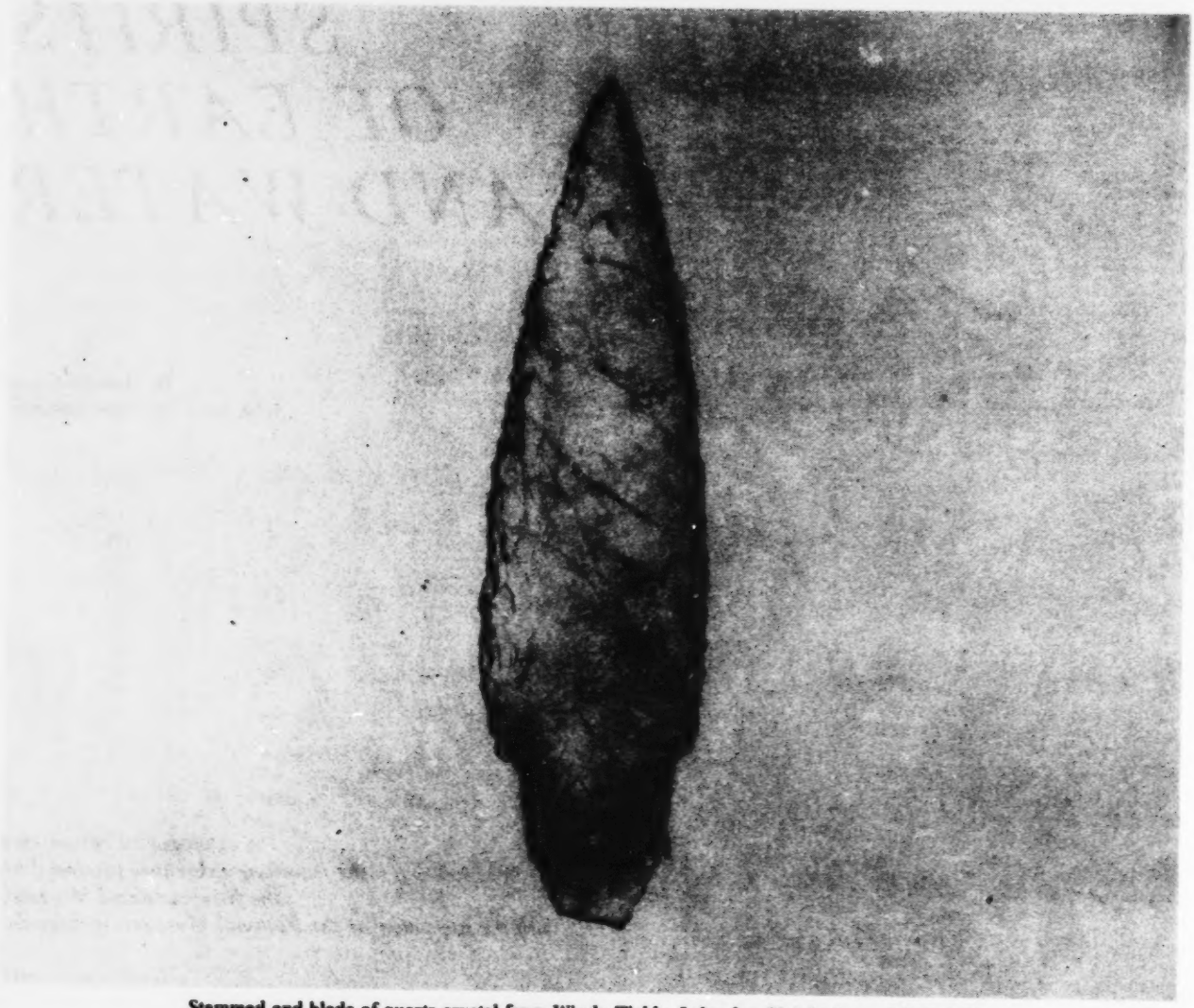
SPIRITS OF EARTH AND WATER

By Brenda Clark
with Jane Sproull-Thomson

A catalogue to accompany
the travelling exhibition produced by
the Newfoundland Museum,
with the assistance of the National Museums of Canada.

1981



Stemmed end blade of quartz crystal from Windy Tickle, Labrador. Height 5 cm. (GkC1-1:59)

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Introduction

L'exposition "Esprits de la terre et des eaux" concerne la culture esquimaude dorsétienne à Terre-Neuve et au Labrador (circa 2,800-900 avant aujourd'hui). La culture dorsétienne de Terre-Neuve et du Labrador constituait l'expression locale d'une tradition que prévalait dans l'Arctique canadien et le Groenland avant que s'installe la culture esquimaude thuléenne. L'expansion du travail sur le terrain des dernières années a mis à jour un nombre impressionnant d'artéfacts. L'un d'entre eux, la figurine d'un ours polaire en position assise a été considérée par les archéologues comme l'une des plus spectaculaires découvertes de la période dorsétienne.

KAUJISAUTIK

KemiKKogatsautillugit "Torngat Nuname Imappimillo" pitjutiKavut Inutuinanik itsasuanitanik mane Labradorime Neufulandimillo siago Inuppavininnik (2800-900 sivorngagut). Takkoa Inuit sivollinitait nunaKasimajut Neufulandime Labradorimillo. IlikKosiusimajut takutsausiavut asingit Inuit atamaungaKattasimaningit Kanadaup asianit tamaunga Kanadamut, sorlo Alaskamit, taimaimat atjigingitanginnik mana Inutuinaulittup. Una sananguasimajuk nanungoak sananguatausimajuk sorlo itsanitaumat akuninitanik aKKatinut nagvataumajuk isumagijauvuk tataminiagijauvuk sanasimatsianinga, pitldatumik sanasimatsiamat.

INTRODUCTION: THE SCOPE OF THE EXHIBITION

"Spirits of Earth and Water" is the first major exhibition on the prehistoric Dorset Eskimo culture. For over 2000 years these ancient Eskimos inhabited the Arctic and some sub-Arctic regions east of Alaska, reaching northward to Greenland and southward to the island of Newfoundland. This exhibition focuses on the expression of the Dorset culture in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Newfoundland and Labrador have a rich inheritance from the Dorset period of prehistory, which began 3000 years

ago and continued to 500 years before the present. This legacy is reflected in the large collection of Dorset culture artifacts housed in the Newfoundland Museum in St. John's. This collection, numerically the Museum's largest, is the product of over twenty years of careful and dedicated archaeological work on the island and in Labrador. In fact, the most intensive archaeological work has been conducted within the past 10 years in Labrador, where new and exciting finds have gradually added to our understanding of the Dorset and other Arctic cultures. Indeed, the last decade could be regarded as the beginning of serious study of the Dorset culture across the Arctic.

Many mysteries still surround these ancient Eskimos. Were they the 'Skraelings' of the Norse sagas, the ones "...who drove the Vikings back to their long ships" from the shores of Vinland and Markland? Did they live peacefully side-by-side with the Beothuk Indians, sharing Newfoundland's resources until the Dorset disappeared from the island about 1400 years ago (A.D. 600)? How were the Dorset treated by the Inuit, who left Alaska a thousand years ago to claim the Eastern Arctic for their home? Why did the Dorset culture become extinct shortly after the arrival of the Inuit? Why does the Dorset artistic tradition appear to flourish shortly before their cultural demise? Though these provocative questions may not be answered for another decade, if ever, the recent finds demand exhibition and interpretation to the museum-going public.

The visitor to the exhibition may be surprised by the small size and delicate nature of the Dorset artifacts. Arctic people migrated frequently and therefore kept their possessions small. Thus, the exhibition is an intimate one; the visitor must draw close to examine the efficiency and beauty of Dorset craftmanship and to feel the animation and magical potential of the carvings. This potential is especially apparent in the examples of Dorset art, which feature in this exhibition. Many examples of this regional artistic expression are distinct from Dorset art in other areas of the Arctic, although all are part of a single tradition. Ivory and bone carvings of bears and seals in realistic and abstract forms, human masquettes and the tiny, engaging soapstone carvings from Labrador were all created for functional and perhaps magico-religious reasons. The concept of "art for art's sake" was probably foreign to the Dorset cultural tradition — their art was part of their day-to-day life. This exhibition illustrates this life through the technological artifacts and artwork of the Dorset people.

L'ancêtre esquimau

Les ancêtres du Dorsétien, les Paléo-esquimaux, ont été les premiers à habiter dans l'Arctique, il y a de cela 4,000 ans. Emigrant de l'Alaska, ces gens ont apporté avec eux une tradition technologique qui domina la préhistoire de l'Arctique canadien et du Groenland pendant 3,000 ans. Cette tradition des petits outils de l'Arctique est caractérisée par la petitesse de ses outils finement retouchés.

Les Dorsétiens étaient les derniers Paléo-esquimaux. Leur occupation à Terre-Neuve et au Labrador débute vers 500 av. J-C. et se poursuit de façon continue jusqu'à 1,400 A.D. A cette époque, cette culture disparait mystérieusement. La cause pourrait être partiellement attribuable à l'immigration thuléenne qui débute vers le même temps au Labrador.

Itsanitait Inuit sivollet

Itsanitait Inuit sivollet inusimavut 4-tausendit jaret sivongagut pisimavullo Alaskamit Kanadamullo Karallimullo aitldotik, inaimavut jarene 3-tausinnine nungokKagatik, sanangoasiasimaniKatldatunik sanangovattuvinet, ilangit sanangoasimajangit mikijuvut tataminnalutik. Tamakkoa Inuit sivollinitait kingollipausimavut inuppauldotik inutuinait, kingollingille Inuit mikijuvut, maunga Labradorimut Neufulandimullo tikiajalauttut 500 BC — 400 AD tikillogo. Takkua Inuit inuppait manakut tataminianattumik nungoinnasimavut okua Inuit uvlome inulittut tikimata maunga Labradorimut Neufulandimullo.

THE ANCIENT ESKIMOS

The Arctic region from the Mackenzie Delta to Greenland has been inhabited for about 4000 years. The people who lived on this sensitive and beautiful but often forbidding frontier usually lived in scattered, isolated hunting bands. Archaeologists call the earliest inhabitants the "Palaeo-Eskimos" or "Old Eskimos". Emigrating from Alaska, these people brought a technological tradition that dominated Canadian Arctic and Greenland prehistory for 3000 years. This tradition, which probably originates ultimately in Asia and the Bering Sea region, has been

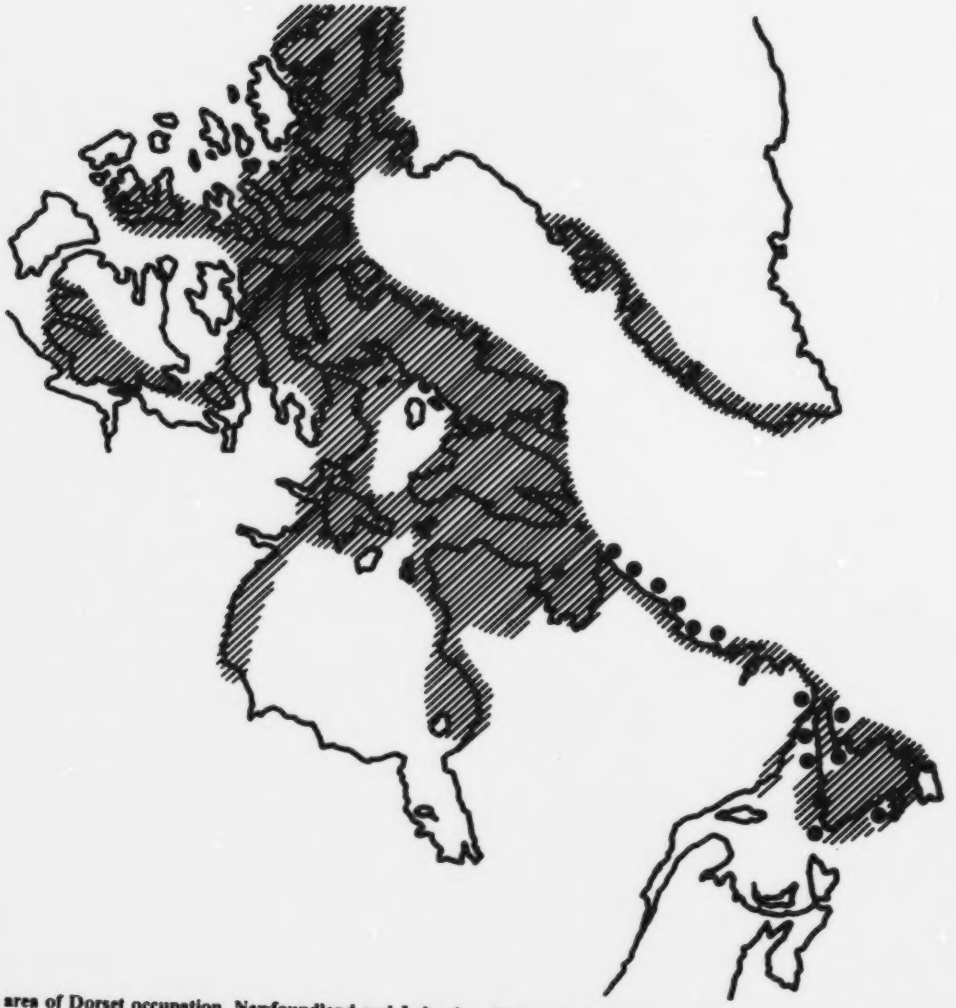

Figure 1. Probable area of Dorset occupation. Newfoundland and Labrador. Sites marked are those with artifacts featured in the exhibition.

After McGhee: CANADIAN ARCTIC PREHISTORY

called the Arctic Small Tool Tradition, and is characterized by small, beautiful, finely-flaked stone tools (see Figure opposite contents page).

The oldest Palaeo-Eskimo culture is the Independence I culture found in the High Arctic between 2000-1700 B.C. The direct ancestors of the Dorset Eskimos, the Pre-Dorset people, were established across the Arctic between 1800-900 B.C. The Dorset were the last of the Palaeo-Eskimos and their distinctive culture developed in the Eastern Canadian Arctic nearly three millennia ago. Geographically, the Dorset culture is found thinly scattered from Banks Island in the west to Greenland in the east, north to Ellesmere Island and northern Greenland, and as far south as the Sub-Arctic forests of Newfoundland (Figure 1). The main Dorset occupation of Newfoundland and Labrador began about 500 B.C. There seems to be a continuous development from this population until about A.D. 600 in Newfoundland and as late as A.D. 1500 in Labrador.[1] Here, as in most cases elsewhere in the Arctic, the Dorset mysteriously disappeared shortly after the arrival of the Inuit (Figure 2).

The Inuit were the last of the Alaskan Eskimo to emigrate eastward and were established in the Central and Eastern Arctic by A.D. 1200. Also called the Thule people, these ancestors of the present-day Inuit were culturally very different from the Dorset. Their roots lay in the whale-hunting tradition of northern Alaska, a tradition

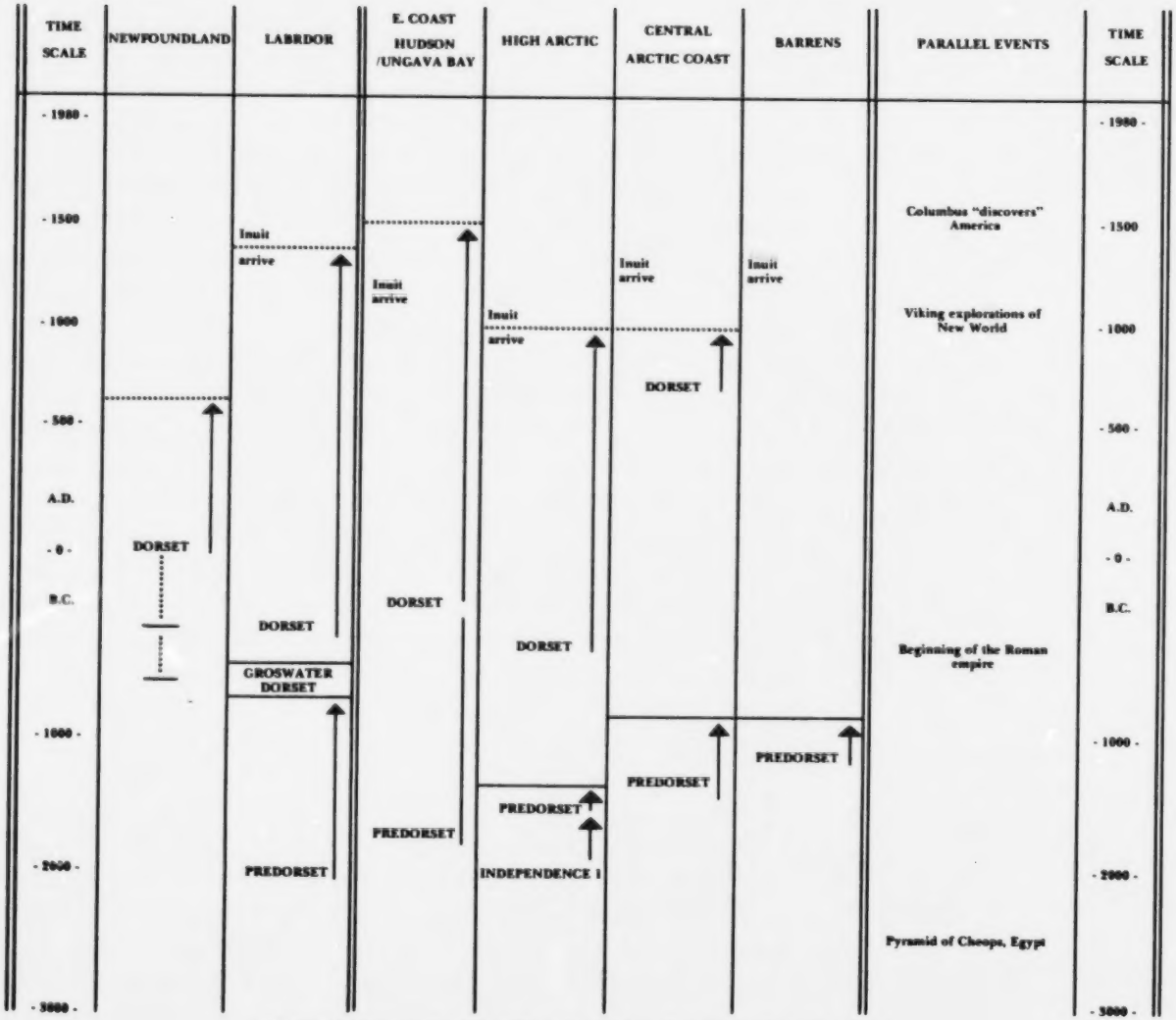

Figure 2. Comparative Time Chart for Eskimo Cultures in Canadian Arctic.

characterized by large open-water skin boats, co-operative hunting and a complex harpoon technology. As they moved eastward, they adapted their lives to the different Arctic sub-regions and rapidly gained dominance over them.

Several Dorset sites date to well after the coming of the Inuit, and contact between the two groups was likely. It is even possible that the Dorset were exterminated or assimilated by the Inuit or driven from the best hunting grounds. Both groups would probably have been suspicious of strangers. Since the Inuit would have had the advantages of larger groups and more efficient weapons and transportation, it seems likely that contact between the two groups was hostile.

Although the nature of their acquaintance is uncertain, we know that the Dorset people left a vivid impression on the Inuit, one which has survived to the present in oral tradition concerning an earlier people whom they called the **Tunnit.**[2] In this catalogue, the two terms, Dorset (English) and Tunnit (Inuktitut) are used interchangeably. The following pages probe the oral traditions of the Inuit and the archaeological record of the Dorset culture to piece together a visual and written interpretation of the vanished Tunnit of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Tunnit: Le Dorsétien à Terre-Neuve et au Labrador

Plusieurs légendes inuites parlent d'individus appelés *Tunnit* ayant véçu dans cette contrée avant eux. Les anthropologues croient que ces individus étaient des Dorsétiens. Ils essaient en assemblant ces legendes à des bribes d'information provenant de sites archéologiques de découvrir leur histoire culturelle.

Les *Tunnits* avaient un mode de vie comparable à celui des Inuits. Il est de plus plausible que les *Tunnits* auraient enseigné la construction de maison en neige, aux Inuits. Il s leur manquaient cependant quelques unes des techniques de chasse inuites et leur vie n'était pas aussi confortable. Une des légendes inuites concernant les *Tunnits* peut être illustrée par cette petite figurine (fig. 3) sculptée par un artiste dorsétien. Cette pièce représente comment lors de la chasse au phoque, les Tunnits utilisaient des petites lampes sous leurs manteaux qu'ils descendaient devant les genoux. La légende mentionne que les *Tunnits* s'infligeaient souvent des brûlures à l'abdomen par l'oubli de cette lampe, vu l'excitement causé à l'arrivée de la proie. Il est à noter que le collet levé plutôt qu'un capuchon sur cette figurine pourrait très bien représenter le mode vestimentaire dorsétien. Les Dorsétiens étaient d'habiles artisans, leurs outils en pierre étaient fabriqués de façon impeccable par de fines retouches. Des différences mineures dans la forme des outils ont permis aux archéologues de classifier la culture dorsétienne du Labrador en trois phases: ancienne, moyenne et tardive. Les artéfacts de la culture dorsétienne à Terre-Neuve sont comparables à ceux de la période moyenne.

Plusieurs contes inuits décrivent les *Tunnits* comme étant des êtres doués d'une stature et d'une force surhumaines. D'autres légendes parent d'animosité entre *Tunnit* et Inuit. Quelques uns suggèrent que ces hostilités ont été un des facteurs de l'extinction de la culture dorsétienne au Labrador.

Tunnit; Inuppait Inuit inusimajut Neufulandime Labradorimillo

Inuit unikkavapput sivongagut Tunninik taijaujunik inuiKalauninganik. Makkoa akininitavatsuanik aKKatet Kenijattet Kablunat Kaujisattete ivittitavut katitsuilutillo tamanna sulimangat Inuit sivollenitait inuppausimamangata, Kanollo inusimamangata. Tamakkoa inuppavinet inutuinatitut ilikKotiKasimagasugijauvut, ilinniatitsisimagasugillogit kingongagut inutuinanik inuppaungittunik illuvigaliugiamik. Inuttule omajuniagiamik ilisimattigisimalungilat, taimaimalo mana Kaujisattauvut Kanutsiak inusiKasimamangata Kaujisattinut. Atautsik una sanangoataumajuk takkononga inuppanut tukiKavuk Kanok Tunnit puijinniaKattanimangata, Kullikatldotik Kulittane iluagut seKo'minut atanut ilisimatidogo, taimaimat takkoa Tunniunigattaujut namigut otaKattasimavut puijigaigamik Kulliminik puiguKattanigamik sulle ikumajumik Kulliminik. Unattauk Kungasimmiutaujattuk kukulugane takutsausiagivuk Kanok takkoa inuppait annugattuKattasimamangata. Ammatauk sanaKattasimagivut pinasotinik sanamatsiatunik mikijunik angijunillo, sanasimatsianingit tataminniagijauvut. Unipkagijauvut inunnut nukilialusimanningit angijualusimanningillo. Ammatauk mana unikagijauvapput inutuinanik inuKatiKatsiasimanginginnik, inuit mana inulittut tikiajamata nungoinnasimajut maunga Kanadamut.

TUNNIT: THE DORSET PEOPLE OF NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

Although the Tunnit or Dorset people did not leave a written record of their way of life, achievements, philosophy, or fears, they did leave a legacy in the form of house ruins, food bone refuse, and bone and stone tools and artwork; small things that were lost, forgotten, or discarded. Most of our knowledge and understanding of the Dorset culture comes from the archaeological record. This record is being compiled through excavations all over the Central and Eastern Arctic, including Newfoundland and Labrador, and a coherent impression of the Dorset

culture and its regional and temporal variations over 2000 years is beginning to develop.

To complement this "stones and bones" archaeological culture, we are fortunate to be able to draw upon a body of folktales and legends from the oral tradition of the historic Central and Eastern Arctic Inuit. Although the last Dorset lived more than 500 years ago, memories of them are firmly imprinted on the Inuit legends. Academic theory distinguishes between myths, legends and folktales, but the Inuit say that all are *unikkaatuat* — "stories" — and that all are historical and true. *Unikkaatuat* run the gamut from origin myths, to tales recounting flights of the spirits, to stories about dwarfs and giants.[3] Although these *unikkaatuat* are not within the realm of true historical events, other stories that form part of the Inuit oral traditions do have some basis in the historical past. Even so, these have become distorted and fantastic through the telling and re-telling. The Tunnit legends may be characterized as recordings of events in the true historical past. These legends vary from place to place. Sometimes they are contradictory, but by and large they offer similar observations on these ancient Eskimos. The legends speak of their appearance and dress codes, their hunting life, their tools and house styles, their personalities and habits, and their relations with the Inuit. Archaeology has established that there were two distinct traditions in the Arctic regions of Canada and Greenland that overlapped for a period of roughly 400 years (between A.D. 1100-1500). One of these traditions is still obscure, but it is quite

likely that these two peoples encountered one another. A case may thus be made for accepting the Inuit tales of the legendary Tunnit as descriptions of the same people whom archaeologists call the Dorset.

Although not all the Tunnit legends can be considered wholly accurate, it is fascinating to learn about the Dorset/Tunnit as they were perceived by their contemporaries. By combining the "facts" of the archaeological record and the "facts" of the Inuit legends, there arise some animated, insightful and occasionally humorous observations on the Dorset people.

Lifestyle and Technology

The Dorset were an Arctic/Sub-Arctic adapted people who favoured a maritime tundra environment. There is every reason to suspect that the Dorset people occupying different regions of the Arctic followed a living pattern similar to that of the historic Inuit in the same areas. In both Labrador[4] and Newfoundland, this meant that fall and winter were spent at coastal locations in semi-subterranean sod houses. Some archaeologists believe that the Dorset also used snow houses for temporary hunting shelters.[5] It is possible that the technique of building snow houses may have been passed from the Dorset to the Inuit newcomers.

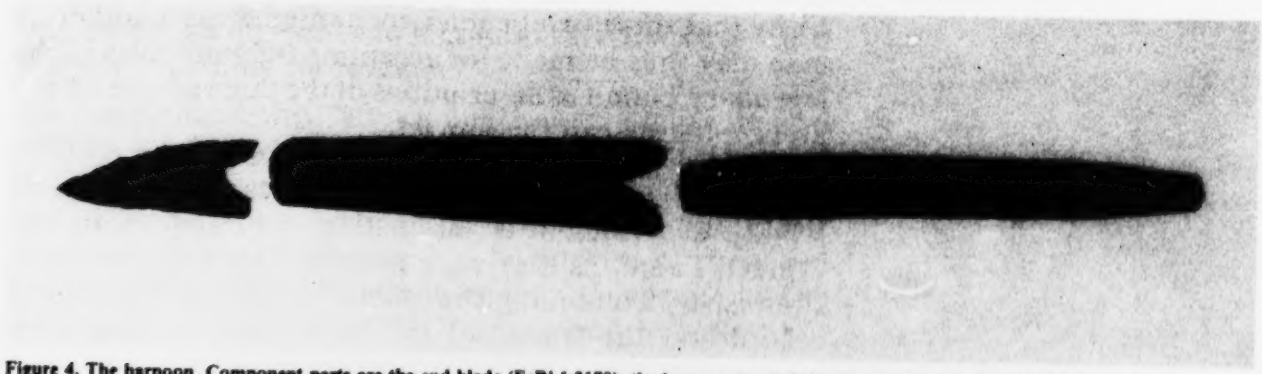

Figure 4. The harpoon. Component parts are the end blade (EeBi-1:2179), the harpoon head (Y4.15B), and the foreshaft (J4.15.C)

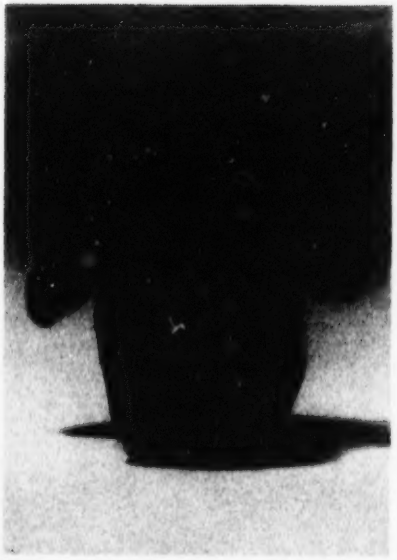

Figure 3. Soapstone carving of a Dorset hunter from Saglek Bay, Labrador. Height 3 cm. (IdCq-22:145).

One of the winter hunting activities was breathing hole sealing, a patient game of waiting above a seal's breathing hole in the ice, harpoon at the ready, until the unsuspecting animal surfaced to take a breath. There is a legend about breathing hole sealing which tells how a Tunnit hunter would hold a small stone lamp under the pegged-down skirt of his coat to keep warm during the long wait for a seal. It is said that Tunnit often had burn scars on their bellies because they forgot about the hot lamp in the excitement of the kill. The Dorset carving in soapstone recovered from Shuldham island, Labrador, reminds one of the squatting figure of a hunter waiting by a breathing hole (Figure 3)[6]. In spring, tent camps were established to hunt basking seal at break-up. The summer was probably also spent oriented to coastal resources, though there may have been some caribou hunting and fishing undertaken in the near interior.

Frequently Tunnit legends support the discoveries of archaeologists. One such example deals with Dorset house forms. According to the Inuit, Tunnit had stone houses[7] dug into the ground, but differing from the Inuit houses in their square or rectangular rather than circular shape,[8] and in their open hearths.[9] These descriptions conform to archaeological data from excavations in Newfoundland and Labrador, where, in addition, there was a preference for wood-burning fires. The archaeological record has supplied the greatest amount of information about the technology of the Dorsets. Like the Inuit, the Dorset had many tools made of several component parts. A good

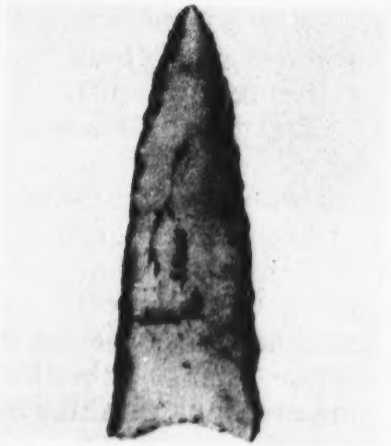

Figure 5. Middle Dorset type and blade (ldCq-22:373)

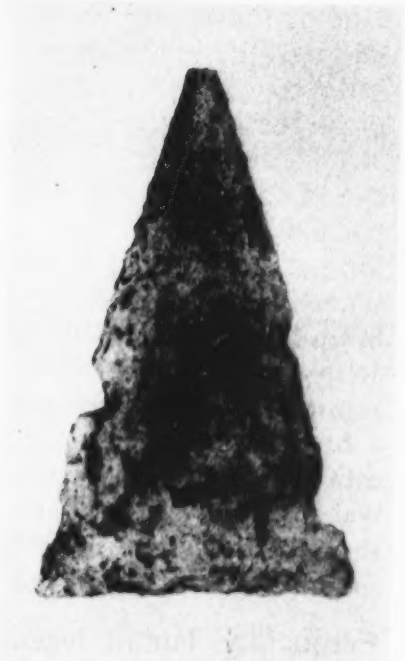

Figure 6.) Early Dorset type end blade (ldCq-19:16)

Figure 7. Late Dorset type end blade (ldCq-22:390)

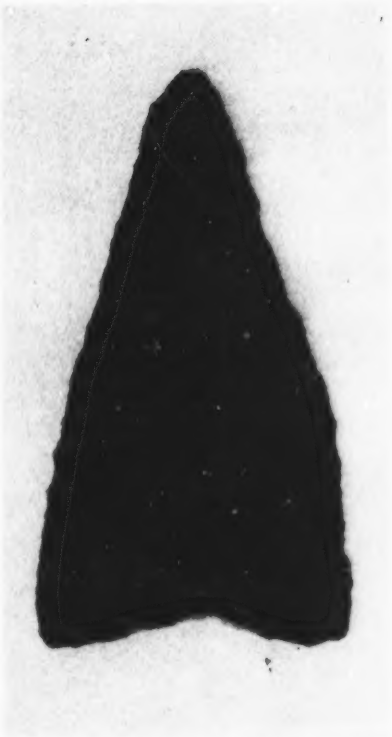

Figure 8. Newfoundland Dorset type end blade (EeBi-1:26d). Local raw materials were used for tools by the Newfoundland Dorset people.

example of a composite item is the harpoon, a weapon used for hunting sea mammals (Figure 4). Dorset harpoons were simple in design, consisting of the harpoon head and the foreshaft, the wooden shaft, and the harpoon line. If the harpoon head was not self-bladed, a stone end blade was used. Although the Dorset apparently lacked the fine, highly specialized forms of Inuit sea mammal hunting tools, their harpoons were as effective in exploiting the same animals.[10]

The Dorset were skilled craftsmen; their tools were well made and finely flaked. Characteristic of these are harpoon end blades, graving tools called "burin-like tools", knives and scrapers. Of course, many of these are parts of composite tools and were usually hafted to a handle of wood, bone or ivory. Changes in this tool-kit through time allow archaeologists to distinguish Early, Middle and Late Dorset phases (illustrated in Figures 5, 6 and 7). Recent evidence suggests that Newfoundland Dorset culture developed out of an early Palaeo-Eskimo group on the island with some influence from later Labrador Dorset people. It covers approximately the same period as the Middle Dorset phase in Labrador (Figure 8).

Until recently little was known about Dorset transportation and it was generally assumed that these early Eskimos did not have dogs, sleds or boats. Skeletal remains of domesticated dog have now been recovered from the two Dorset sites in the Canadian Arctic.[11] In North Baffin

Island, Newfoundland and Labrador, sled shoes, which were fitted to runners for smoother traction over snow and ice, have also been found. It is not certain whether the sleds were hand-hauled or whether dog traction was in use. Dogs might, however, have been used in some areas as pack animals. On Baffin Island model boats, not unlike recent Baffin Island Inuit kayaks, have been found.[12] There is some controversy in the Inuit legends regarding the use of kayaks in the Dorset culture. The Netsilik say that the Tunnit **did** use kayaks but others, like the Baffin Islanders, say that they did not.[13] This problem has not yet been postively resolved through archaeology. It is possible both sources of information are correct and that the kayak, as well as the sled and the use of dogs, was known in some locations but not in others. Little is known about Dorset clothing. Items of skin and fur do not survive the ravages of time as do stone tools and thus the archaeological record is of little relevance. There are a few general descriptions in the legends referring to Tunnit dress, which say that they wore bearskin breeches[14] and a caribou skin coat that reached to the knees[15] and that women wore long boots.[16] Further, the legends recall that the Tunnit did not know how to prepare seal[17] or caribou[18] skins properly. The nature of the Arctic climate, however, dictates the necessity of tailored clothing and this is reflected in the Shuldham Island soapstone figurine (Figure 3), which shows mittens and a coat that apparently had a collar rather than a hood.

This discussion has provided a glimpse of basic Dorset technology through the media of archaeology and folklore. The legends speak further about Tunnit personality and appearance and relations with the Inuit.

The Tunnit: Hostile Giants or Timid Neighbours?

Many of the Inuit folktales picture the Tunnit or Dorset people in what we might consider an unrealistic manner. For instance, they are called giants with superhuman strength, or, in the case of folktales from Greenland,[19] they are imagined as fantastic inland creatures. This theme of great size and strength of the Tunnit persists throughout the legends. One Inuit legend from Labrador, recorded by the Moravian missionaries, says that

> "While dwelling among us they had sealskins with the blubber attached for bedrobes. Their clothes were made in the same way. Their weapons were formed of slate and hornstone, and their drills of crystal. *They were strong and formidable...*"[20]

Another Labrador tale recalls the last of the Tunnit:

> "A big, overgrown giant, the last of the Tunnit left on the Labrador coast, lived a long time ago near Hebron. He would not hunt or do any work. Whenever he wanted food he took it away from the hunters. He would watch when they brought in their seals at the end of the day's hunt, and go up to them and take his choice. They were all afraid of him on account of his size and strength and did not dare resist him."[21]

Figure 9. Modern soapstone carving by Noah Kenourak, depicting the legend of Sankilussi. Height 26 cm. On loan from the National Museum of Man (WB-1-1973-1) by permission of Canadian Ethnology Service, National Museum of Man, National Museums of Canada.

Finally, a legend told by Ivaluardjuk of the Iglulik area of the Central Arctic recounts the strength of the Tunnit in hunting:

> "When they had harpooned a walrus with the short line, they gave it a jerk, and so strong were they that this broke the creature's neck."[22]

Besides providing observations on some physical traits of the Dorset, some legends indicate rather poor relations between Tunnit and Inuit. One underlying theme is that the Tunnit were lazy and stupid, at least according to the Inuit who, like other people, prefer to downplay their adversaries' intelligence. More obvious is the theme of hostility. Modern Inuit occasionally depict these stories about the Tunnit. In the exhibition is a carving by Noah Kenourk of Povungnituk, about the legend of Saakiluusi,[23] a Tunnit giant who used to kill Inuit. Finally the Inuit decided to kill him. A hunter waited at the entrance of his house, and when Saakiluusi came out he didn't see the tiny Inuit waiting with bow and arrow. He was hit in the belly with an arrow, and went into his house and died there. (Figure 9).

From the legends then, it seems that the two groups may have been friendly at first, or at least lived together peaceably. Most legends record that the Tunnit started hostilities against the Inuit who retaliated and eventually either killed all the Tunnit or chased them away. The Labrador Inuit recall that

> "Our ancestors and the *tunneks (or Tunnit)* in days of yore lived together; but the tunneks fled from fear of our

Figure 10. Miniature mask fragment of soapstone from Saglek Bay, Labrador. Height 2.5 cm. (IdCq-22:395).

Figure 11. Wooden mask from Avayalik Islands, Labrador. Height 11 cm. (JaDb-10:2998).

people, who used to drill holes in their foreheads while yet alive."[24]

The Dorset culture disappears completely from the archaeological record after the arrival of the Inuit. The legends suggest that Inuit hostilities towards the Dorset were one factor in the latters' extinction.

On the island of Newfoundland, the Dorset people faced another potentially hostile situation. Here, their neighbours were not Inuit but Indian, possibly the ancestors of the Beothuk (or Red Indians) of Newfoundland. Unfortunately, almost nothing is known of the relationship between these two groups except that they lived side by side more or less successfully for 400 years (between A.D. 200 — A.D. 600), after which time the Dorset disappear from the archaeological record in Newfoundland. The factors involved in the demise of this cultural tradition across the Arctic and in Newfoundland are still largely unknown and Dorset extinction remains shrouded in mystery.

Esprits de la terre et des eaux

L'art dorsétien nous donne un reflet de la vie intellectuelle et des croyances de ces gens. Les experts qui ont étudié ces artéfacts s'entendent à dire qu'ils sont les signes d'un système magico-religieux basé sur la croyance que les esprits contrôlent la vie des personnes et des animaux. Commes les Inuits, les Dorsétiens avaient probablement des sorciers ou "saints hommes" pour expliquer ces esprits. Quelques unes de ces figurines pourraient avoir été faites ou utilisées par des sorciers. D'autres étaient probablement des amulettes portées sur soi par des membres du groupe à des fins de protection ou d'aide.

Les ours avaient une grande importance dans la culture dorsétienne. Les *Tunnits* ont peut-être cru à la façon des Inuits historiques qu'un sorcier peut-être transformé en ours ou que l'ours est un messager auprès du monde des esprits. Les ours semblent avoir joué un rôle important dans les activités de sorcellerie. Les sculptures d'ours se retrouvent aussi bien à l'intérieur qu'à l'extérieur des maisons.

Les Dorsetiéns à Terre Neuve utilisèrent intensément des formes abstraites pour représenter les animaux. La dominance des formes abstraites ou détriment des naturelles distingue l'art dorsétien de Terre-Neuve à celui du haut Arctique et du Labrador.

Torngat Nuname Imappimillo

Makkoa inuppavinet sanangoasimajangit Kanok ilikKotiKasimamangata takutsausiavut, inutuinanut sananguatausimajut Kanok inuppait sivollet ilikKotiKasimamangata, itsasuanitanik Kenijattinut Kaujijauvut TorngaKasimajuviniuninginnik angakkuKattasimaninginillo, takkununga sananguaganut aulatsiKattasimaningit omajunik inunnilo Kaujijauvut, inutuinatitut mananitakkut angakkukattasimagivut, makkoa sanagaugait atuttauKattasimagasugijauvut angakkunut sivongane. NanualuiKKok sivollinut oppigijauvasimavut angakkuiguk nanualugusongonimatta siago angakkuligaigamik, sullo mana inutuinait taimak Kaujimamata manamunut. Nanungoat sanavinet itsasuanitait sulle nagvatauvamata Kenijattinut Kaujisattinullo, mana uvluk aglat tikitldogonut.

THE DORSET ARTISTIC TRADITION

Besides offering information on the more mundane aspects of Dorset life, the archaeological record has produced "art objects" which give insight into Dorset thought and religion. Some specimens from the Arctic found *in situ* come from Middle and Late Dorset sites, but many of these exciting pieces are from unknown locations. In Newfoundland and Labrador most artistic specimens have been recovered from Middle and Late Dorset period sites between A.D. 100 to A.D. 1200 and principally from Port aux Choix in Newfoundland and major Labrador

Figure 12. Hooded figure of soapstone from Saglek Bay, Labrador. Height 2.8 cm. (IdCq-22:393).

Figure 13. Human figure of soapstone from Komaktorvik Fiord, Labrador. Height 2.1 cm. (IhCw-1:664).

Figure 14. Human skull carving of soapstone, from Saglek Bay, Labrador. Height 2.5 cm. (IdCq-22:394).

Figure 15. Human face incised in ivory, from Avayalik Islands, Labrador. Height 7.9 cm. (JaDb-10:3573).

sites, including Avayalik, Shuldam Island, Rose Island, Komaktorvik and Koliktalik. These collections represent a unique regional expression within the broad Eastern Arctic Dorset tradition.

A concise definition of the Dorset artistic tradition was give by Taylor[25]:

> "....essentially a magico-religious art founded in shamanism and burial rites and an art incorporating amulets, carvings of spirit helpers, small sculptures in the round, human depictions, animal motifs, especially the bear, incised designs including crosses and so-called skeletal motif, and realistic and other styles of expression....small scale, customarily in bone, antler and ivory, and, in lucky cases of preservation, bits of driftwood."

To date, every scholar of Dorset art has placed it in a magico-religious context related to an animistic belief system whereby the lives of people and animals are ruled by numerous controlling spirits. Within this belief system a shaman or "holy man" (or woman) acted as an intermediary between the people and the spirit world. Most of the objects that fall under the category of "art", including amulets, carvings and shamans' props, were produced for purposes such as 1) sympathic and contagious hunting magic, whereby an amulet or charm either attracted animals to the hunter to be killed (sympathic magic) or endowed the hunter with special animal qualities like the stealth of a wolf or the strength of a bear (contagious magic); 2) help against illness; 3) help against bad spirits or more generally, help to cope with the ever-present and feared supernatural world, and 4) use in

Figure 17. Abstract bearded seal of walrus in ivory from Port au Choix, Newfoundland. Length 8.6 cm. (T1.44.D)

Figure 16. Seal carving of ivory from Port au Choix, Newfoundland. Length 4.4 cm. (F1.28c)

bear ritual, since a reverence for bears was common among historic and probably circumpolar peoples.

The shaman used many props or aids during his performance of communication with the spirit world. These aids promoted his effectiveness in this endeavour and helped to convince his patrons of his sincerity and power. Artifacts interpreted as shamans' props include false teeth, miniature implements, sucking tubes (for extracting a patient's illness caused by bad spirits) and masks. Masks are both miniature and lifesize and were likely a very effective tool because as one scholar writes: "for the audience, the mask was a concrete personification of the spirit world — a world accessible to the shaman but not to themselves."[26] Two masks have been recovered from Labrador, one a broken miniature mask of soapstone (Figure 10) showing tatoo marks, and the other a larger mask of wood (Figure 11) whose eyes are slanted slits and whose mouth is puckered as if blowing.

The human being was a common subject in Dorset art from the whole of the Dorset culture area with a notable exception of the island of Newfoundland. In Labrador, besides the masks, there are several soapstone figurines including the two illustrated in Figure 12 and 13, a unique human skull carved from soapstone (Figure 14), and an incised ivory face (Figure 15).

Many different animals were used as subjects in Dorset carvings from across the Arctic including swans, falcons, owls, seals, bears, and walrus. In Newfoundland, seals

Figure 18. Walrus head of bone from Port au Choix, Newfoundland. Height 6.1 cm. (S148.B), ivory bear's head from Avayalik Islands, Labrador, length 3.1 cm. (JaDi-10:3558), and caribou hoof of antler, length 6.1 cm. (H2.50c)

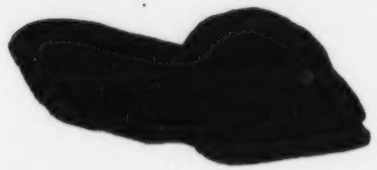

Figure 20. Soapstone bird head from Saglek Bay, Labrador. Length 2.8 cm. (IdCq-22:408)

Figure 21. Incised and miniature harpoon heads from Port au Choix, Nfld., and Avayalik Islands, Labrador. Height, l. to r. 5.9, 3.4, 3.0, 6.0 cm. (Y4.15B, T1.48A, R3.55C, JaDb-10:3472).

Figure 19. Whelk shell of soapstone from Saglek Bay, Labrador. Height 3.8 cm. (IdCq-22:406)

were the most important food resources for the Dorset people. Not surprisingly, carvings of seals figure prominently in Newfoundland Dorset art (Figures 16 & 17) and may have been used in hunting magic, appealing to the spirit of the seal to allow itself to be killed by the hunter. Moreover, in Newfoundland Dorset art, carvings of animal parts predominate and, excepting seals, full-figured animals are rare. Thus we find a walrus head and tusks, or just the tusks, exquisitely carved ivory bears' heads, and caribou hooves (Figures 18 & 25). Labrador, on the other hand, is more like the other Arctic areas in having carvings of complete animals such as soapstone bears, human figurines and, suprisingly, a delicate whelk shell (Figure 19) in addition to having animal parts. (Figure 20).

Decoration in the form of incised lines occurs on utilitarian objects from both Newfoundland and Labrador (Figure 21). It is noteworthy that the only decorated tools are harpoon heads. Some archaeologists have interpreted the motive behind these incisions as purely decorative[27] while others[28] feel that the incisions are symbolic or magical charms for hunting. In fact, the emphasis on artistic treatment of hunting implements in the Dorset artistic tradition is evident not only in the decoration of harpoon heads but also in the making of miniature harpoon amulets (Figure 21) and in the carving of effigies of predacious helping spirits like the bear (Figure 22). These carvings and amulets are all very small

Figure 25. Bear heads of bone and ivory from Avayalik Islands, Labrador, Port aux Choix and Englee, Newfoundland. Length l. to r.: 3.1, 3.3, 2.9, 4.0, 2.9 cm. (JaDb-10:3558, Fc.53, U3. 21A, EeBa-17, B1. 23. C2)

Figure 23. Swimming or flying bear of ivory from Port au Choix, Newfoundland. Length 4.1 cm. (K2.50A)

Figure 22. Soapstone bear from Saglek Bay, Labrador. Height 4.3 cm. (IdCq-22:407)

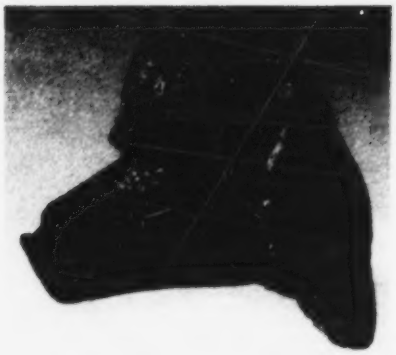

Figure 24. Bear cub of soapstone from Saglek Bay, Labrador. Height 2.4 cm. (IdCq-22:399)

and obviously meant to be handled, carried on one's person, or hidden in some small, secret place.

Arguments have been put forward that Dorset amulets and carvings were made by specialist shaman-artists.[29] After an analysis of the Port aux Choix collection, Elmer Harp, Jr.[30] contended that this is not the case in Newfoundland where there is no direct evidence for shamanic activities, where there is a random distribution of art pieces on one site and where there is a wide range of carving styles from one site. He concluded that the Newfoundland Dorset people used a more individualized hunting magic rather than direct involvement with a shaman intermediary. Of course, these arguments are not necessarily contradictory.[31] Both individualized hunting magic and intervention by shaman-artists could have occurred simultaneously in the same community. Certainly, from the Newfoundland collection, the rendition of the pieces ranges from exquisite to haphazard and almost certainly different pieces were created for different motives.

On the other hand, carvings of bears are more formal and ritualized than the other carvings and amulets, perhaps owing to their prominent role in shamanic functions. Bears were evidently of great significance in the Dorset culture, judging from the frequency of carved bears found on Dorset sites: flying bears, often with their skeletal features marked, swimming bears (Figure 23), full-bodied (Figure 24) or just carved heads (Figure 25); bear skulls,

and bears portrayed both realistically and in highly abstract forms.

In historic times, Arctic people of both the Old World and the New World respected the bear as an enemy and as a helper. Polar bears are large, powerful and curious animals. When walking on their hinds legs they are very human-like. The Tunnit may have believed, as did the historic Inuit, that a shaman could be transformed into a bear or that the bear figured as a messenger to the spirit world, that supernatural dimension whose inhabitants were all-important to the welfare and well-being of the people of the living world. Thus we find carvings of flying or swimming bears and harpoon head amulets that resemble the bear carvings in form. (Shamans could also take flight on the back of a harpoon).

The Dorset in Newfoundland made great use in their carvings of animals of abstract froms which are not found in the High Arctic. Characteristic of this abstraction is the seal amulet, the bearded seal or walrus carving, and the bears' heads. The incised lines of the bearded seal/walrus effigy may represent part of the skeleton and whiskers of this animal. The sequence of bears' heads show the range from abstraction to realism used by Newfoundland Dorset carvers (Figure 25). Both styles appear to be contemporaneous.

The Newfoundland Dorset art collection represents a distinct regional expression within a broader artistic tradition. A set of themes prevails in this collection that is

different from that of other Dorset regions. There is an absence of artifacts overtly relating to shamanic activity, a rarity of full-figured animal carvings, a notable absence of anthropomorphic carvings and a domination of abstract forms over naturalistic forms. On the other hand, in the Labrador collections we find masks which relate to shaman's activities, full-figured carvings like the soapstone polar bears, and many anthropomorphic carvings in different forms — masks, incised faces, full-figures. Most of these themes link the Labrador pieces to other Arctic collections.

The development of such a distinctive artistic style among Newfoundland Dorset people is puzzling. Perhaps one factor is that this was an island population with strong roots in the Late Pre-Dorset and very Early Dorset cultures of central and southern Labrador.[32] Once the population was established subsequent isolation and lack of communication with latter Dorset population in Labrador and the northern core-area mitigated against transmission of new ideas and the island population was left to its own innovations and stylistic development.

LAMENT FOR THE DORSETS[33]

by Al Purdy

Animal bones and some mossy tent rings
scrapers and spearheads carved ivory swans
all that remains of the Dorset giants
who drove the Vikings back to their long ships[34]
talked to spirits of earth and water
— a picture of terrifying old men
so large they broke the backs of bears
so small they lurk behind bone rafters
in the brain of modern hunters
among good thoughts and warm things
and come out at night
to spit on the stars

The big men with clever fingers
who had no dogs and hauled their sleds
over the frozen northern oceans
awkward giants
killers of seal
they couldn't compete with little men
who came from the west with dogs

Or else in a warm climatic cycle
the seals went back to cold waters
and the puzzled Dorsets scratched their heads
with hairy thumbs around 1350 A.D.
— couldn't figure it out
went around saying to each other
plaintively
"What's wrong? What happened?
"Where are the seals gone?

And died

Twentieth century people
apartment dwellers
executives of neon death
warmakers with things that explode
— they have never imagined us in their future
how could we imagine them in the past
squatting among the moving glaciers
six hundred years ago
with glowing lamps?

As remote or nearly
as the trilobites and swamps
when coal became
or the last great reptile hissed
at a mammal the size of a mouse
that squeaked and fled

Did they ever realize at all
what was happening to them?
Some old hunter with one lame leg
a bear had chewed
sitting in a caribou skin tent
— the last Dorset?
Let's say his name was Kudluk
carving 2-inch ivory swans
for a dead grand-daughter
taking them out of his mind
the places in his mind
where pictures are

He selects a sharp stone tool
to gouge a parallel pattern of lines
on both sides of the swan
holding it with his left hand
bearing down and transmitting
his body's weight
from brain to arm and right hand
and one of his thoughts
turns to ivory
The carving is laid aside
in beginning darkness
at the end of hunger
after a while wind
blows down the tent and snow
begins to cover him
After 600 years
the ivory thought
is still warm

CONCLUSION

Although the last of the Tunnit lived 600 years ago, we can still feel their presence through mossy tent rings, tools of bone, stone and ivory, and beautiful carvings of animals, masks and human figurines that have lain abandoned over the centuries. In Newfoundland and Labrador the Dorset occupy a prominent chapter in prehistory and much of their story remains to be told.

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FOOTNOTES

1. The site referred to here is Dog Bight L-1 dated A.D. 1520 and cited in Steven Cox, "Palaeo-Eskimo Occupations of the North Labrador Coast", *Arctic Anthropology* (1978), Vol. 15, no. 2. p. 111.
2. Although some Inuit legends about Tunnit may have been based on early Thule culture peoples, most scholars accept the Dorset-Tunnit correlation.
3. Zebedee Nungak and Eugene Arima, *Eskimo Stories/Unikkaatuat,* National Museums of Canada Bulletin 235 (Ottawa, 1969).
4. Steven Cox, "Palaeo-Eskimo Occupations...", pp. 111-113.
5. Jorgen Meldgaard, "Prehistoric Culture Sequences in the Eastern Arctic as Elucidated by Stratified Sites at Igloolik", in A.F.C. Wallace (ed.), *Selected Papers of the Fifth International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences* (Philadelphia, 1960), pp. 588-595.
6. Jorgen Meldgaard, "Prehistoric Culture Sequences...", p. 594. The carving has also been interpreted as a female figurine and the legends do say that the Tunnit were very fond of their women.
7. This comes from Labrador and Baffin Island legends, according to Therkel Methiassen, *Archaeology of the Central Eskimos,* vol 4 of The Fifth Thule Expedition 1921-24, (Copenhagen, 1927), pp. 186-190, and E.W. Hawkes, *The Labrador Eskimo.* (New York, 1970), p. 144.
8. Jorgen Meldgaard, "Prehistoric Culture Sequences...", p. 589. It should be noted that communal houses of the Labrador Inuit period were rectangular, however.
9. Jorgen Meldgaard, "Prehistoric Culture Sequences...", p. 589.
10. Moreau Maxwell,-"An Early Dorset Harpoon Complex," *Folk* (1975), vol. 16-17, pp. 125-132.
11. The Nanook Site, Baffin Island cited in Moreau Maxwell, "Archaeology of the Lake Harbour District, Baffin Island", *Archaeological Survey of Canada Paper* No. 6. (Ottawa, 1973), and the Lagoon Site, Banks Island, cited in Charles D. Arnold, "Possible Evidence of Domestic Dog in a Palaeo-Eskimo Context", *Arctic* (1979), vol. 32, no. 3, pp. 263-266.

12. Father Guy Mary-Rousseliere, "A few problems elucidated...and new questions raised by recent Dorset finds in the North Baffin Island region", *Arctic* (1979), vol. 32, no. 1 pp. 22-32.
13. Therkel Mathiassen, *Archaeology of the Central Eskimos.* pp. 186-190.
14. This comes from Aivilik and Netsilik legends according to Therkel Mathiassen, *Archaeology of the Central Eskimos,* pp. 186-190.
15. This is a Baffin Island legend according to Therkel Mathiassen, *Archaeology of the Central Eskimos,* pp. 186-190.
16. This is an Aivilik legend according to Therkel Mathiassen, *Archaeology of the Central Eskimos,* pp. 186-190.
17. This is a Baffin Island legend cited in Therkel Mathiassen, *Archaeology of the Central Eskimos,* pp. 186-190, and Franz Boas, *The Central Eskimo,* (University of Nebraska Press, 1964), p. 227.
18. This is a Labrador legend according to Therkel Mathiassen, *Archaeology of the Central Eskimos,* pp. 186-190.
19. Henrik Rink, *Tales and Traditions of the Eskimo,* (McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 1974).
20. Henrik Rink, *Tales and Traditions...,* pp. 469-470.
21. E.W. Hawkes, *The Labrador Eskimo,* p. 148.
22. Knud Rasmussen, *Intellectual Culture of the Hudson Bay Eskimos,* vol. 7 of *The Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition* 1921-24, (Copenhagan, 1930), pp. 256-257.
23. Zebedee Nungak and Eugene Arima, *Eskimo Stories...,* p. 13.
24. E.W. Hawkes, The Labrador Eskimo, p. 146.
25. William Taylor, Jr., "Prehistoric Canadian Eskimo Art," in *Sculpture/Inuit,* (University of Toronto Press, 1971), p. 27.
26. Jean Blodgett, *The Coming and Going of the Shaman: Eskimo Shamanism and Art,* Exhibition Catalogue, The Winnipeg Art Gallery (1979).
27. Elmer Harp, Jr., "Late Dorset Eskimo Art from Newfoundland," *Folk* (1969/70), vol. 11-12, p. 112.
28. George Swinton, "Prehistoric Dorset Art: The Magico-Religious Basis," *The Beaver* (autumn, 1967), pp. 32-47. Richard Jordan, "Dorset Art from Labrador," *Folk* (1979-80), vol. 21-22.
29. George Swinton, "Prehistoric Dorset Art...", p. 11.
30. Elmer Harp, Jr., "Late Dorset Eskimo Art...", p. 121.
31. Richard Jordan, "Dorset Art from Labrador", p. 16.
32. William Fitzhugh, "A Review of Paleo-Eskimo Culture History in Southern Quebec-Labrador and Newfoundland", *Etudes/Inuit/Studies* (1980) vol. 4 nos. 1-2, (1980).
33. By permission of The Canadian Publishers, McClelland & Stewart Ltd., Toronto. "Lament for the Dorsets" was published in *Being Alive.*
34. There is no evidence that the Dorset were the "Skraelings" referred to by the Norse; however the Dorset were living in Labrador at the proposed time of the Norse visits.